POLITICS

Our men in Havana: Arrival of GRU specialists in Cuba points to Russia reviving its base for spying on the US

Sergey Kanev

June 27, 2023

INVESTIGATION TOPIC

GRU ILLEGALS

18 MATERIALS

On June 20, media reports in the US confirmed that the United States government was seriously concerned about the construction of a Chinese spy facility in Cuba. *The Insider has* learned that it was not just China that worried the US: Russia has been reviving the Soviet Lourdes Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) station near Havana, which was officially shut down by Vladimir Putin in 2001. Disguised as diplomats, eavesdroppers from the GRU and technical university graduates majoring in missile defense, computer science, and mathematics, have been secretly redeployed to the island. The spies were identified through their children's enrolment at the Russian embassy's school in Cuba, revealing that these children's fathers are not diplomats, but career intelligence officers specializing in electronic reconnaissance and other related fields.

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A base in exchange for oil

In July 2014, initial reports emerged regarding undisclosed agreements between Moscow and Havana, outlining plans for a significant escalation of espionage activities against the United States. The saga began with the reopening of the Lourdes Radio Electronic Center (REC) situated on the outskirts of Havana. Established in 1967, the REC operated under the supervision of the Soviet Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU), as well as the PGU — a KGB unit responsible for foreign intelligence operations. Equipped with advanced capabilities, the REC intercepted data from US communications satellites, monitored telephone conversations, and accessed messages from NASA's Mission Control Center in Florida. The workforce comprised around three thousand personnel, including military members and contracted individuals. Selected individuals were dispatched to the island years in advance or were chosen based on their strong connections with the KGB.

During the mid-1990s, rumors began to circulate about the potential closure of the REC, a spy center that incurred an annual cost of $200 million for the Russian treasury. Due to financial constraints, the government budget couldn't afford such an expense, resulting in staff members having their salaries withheld. The United States pressed for the closure of the center, linking it to the restructuring of Soviet debt. However, Boris Yeltsin hesitated to take decisive action and passed the issue onto his successor, Vladimir Putin. In December 2000, during a meeting with Fidel Castro, Putin broached the subject of the REC's future. Castro vehemently opposed the idea of shutting down the center, as the rental payments were a significant source of revenue for the Cuban treasury, with a portion of the fees being settled through Russian oil deliveries. Putin reassured the officers from the GRU's 6th Directorate, responsible for radio intelligence at the Lourdes REC, claiming: “We won't close anything.” He even left an entry in the facility's guest book. The center shut down a year later.

Vladimir Putin and Fidel Castro, 2000

The “eavesdroppers” were repatriated to Russia, and some of the expensive equipment was destroyed with sledgehammers, while the remaining equipment was transferred to Klimovsk, near Moscow, where another GRU radio interception center (military base no. 47747) was located. As the GRU officers departed from the Lourdes REC, hundreds of Cubans gathered at the gates and chanted “Traitors!” A new institution, Havana's Information Technology University, was established on the site previously occupied by the REC. Sections of the facilities were leased to intelligence officers from China and North Korea, who allegedly used them to study Spanish.

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Since 2014, however, high-ranking visitors from Russia have been frequenting Cuba. Putin was the first to arrive and write off 90% of Cuba's $35 billion debt. He was followed by ex-President Dmitry Medvedev, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Intelligence (SVR) Director Sergey Naryshkin, Navy Commander Nikolay Yevmenov, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko (assigned to supervise Cuba on behalf of the Russian government), and State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin. Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev visited Havana twice and held “extended Russian-Cuban interdepartmental consultations on security issues.”

Cuba's Communist leaders also frequently make visits to Moscow. In November 2022, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel met with Vladimir Putin. Although the specific details of the agenda were kept secret, pro-Kremlin media hinted that, as customary, the Cuban delegation likely sought financial assistance from Putin while offering to enhance Russia's military presence on the island.

Meanwhile, both Moscow and Havana have denied any information about the reopening of the Lourdes REC.

Havana's GRU residency and a spiritual movie mechanic

It has long been commonplace for Russian embassies to harbor spies from the GRU, SVR, and FSB (Russia's Federal Security Service), with these agencies often displaying a lack of caution regarding the secrecy of their personnel. The embassy in Havana is no exception, as diplomats holding rank insignia can easily be identified through online databases and other sources. One notable figure is General Pyotr Kulikov, who heads the embassy's military attaché and is referred to by *The Insider's* sources as the GRU's chief resident in Cuba. Kulikov is proficient in both Spanish and English and has gained attention during his tenure as the GRU chief resident in Mexico.

Under Kulikov's leadership, three individuals serve as his assistants: Maxim Deltsov, previously stationed at Russia's naval base in Gadzhiyevo in the Murmansk region, “infantryman” Alexander Bykov, and military pilot Vitaly Prokhorov. Alongside their engagement with local agents, the military attachés also participate in educational activities at the Russian embassy's school, providing children with a carefully curated narrative about the war in Ukraine.

Vitaly Prokhorov

General Kulikov is in charge of two more GRU officers working under the guise of embassy secretaries: before being stationed in Cuba, “diplomat” Vitaly Grechukha he was registered at the address of the GRU headquarters at Khoroshevskoye Avenue in Moscow, and took in trout fishing tournaments in the village of Misailovo in the Moscow region.

Another “secretary,” Sergei Donets, previously served in the 38th Airborne Forces Communications Control Brigade, located in the Medvezh'i Ozera settlement in Shchelkovo (military base no. 54164). Just before the invasion of Ukraine, the brigade was transferred to Crimea, where it coordinated communications between airborne units. In June 2022, former brigade commander General Roman Kutuzov was killed near Lugansk. Apparently working undercover as a diplomat, Donets also had something to do with secret military communications.

The post of advisor-counselor at the embassy is held by Anna Vasenkova, a graduate of Moscow's State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), previously worked in the publishing house Respublika and was deputy director of the Latin American Department at Russia’s the Foreign Ministry. Her husband, Sergei Vasenkov, who lives with her in Cuba, has a much more interesting biography.

Vasenkov graduated in cybernetics from the Moscow Institute of Radio Engineering, Electronics and Automation (MIREA), which trains specialists in information security, system analysis, and aircraft rocket engineering. Many MIREA graduates later work in Russia’s special services. Before Havana, Vasenkov worked at Gazprom Geofizika, a subsidiary of Russia's Gazprom, as well as the Russian representative offices of UK companies Petroalliance Services Company Limited and Ethyl Petroleum Additives Limited. According to Russia’s tax database, there are 11,197 Russian nationals and foreigners working at Ethyl Petroleum. *The Insider* has confirmed several career intelligence officers among the company’s employees.

Another cybernetic, Vitaly Kondratenko, also works in Havana. He graduated from Moscow State University’s Faculty of Computational Cybernetics and Mathematics, and was issued officer certificate №GV99839 (№ ГВ 99839) in 1992. Interestingly, Kondratenko is officially associated with Russia's trade mission in Havana, leaving one to wonder about the nature of

his mathematical calculations in faraway Cuba.

Yevgeny Voskoboynik, the head of Russia's state-owned airline Aeroflot's office in Havana, who graduated from the "American" faculty of the Military Diplomatic Academy (VDA), is also worth mentioning. As a GRU officer, he is tasked with not only recruiting Cubans but also overseeing the surveillance of passengers who fly on Russian flights to Havana and monitoring their movements through Mexico to the United States. Voskoboynik was also mentioned in *The Insider's* recent investigation on spies utilizing Aeroflot as a cover worldwide.

The Russian Orthodox Church also has its own representative in Cuba. The Rector of the Our Lady of Kazan Orthodox Cathedral, Maurice (Savva) Gagloev, who previously served in the Department of External Church Relations, and then in Patriarch Kirill's personal secretariat. Father Maurice studied at the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy, and then interned at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in Switzerland.

In Havana, Gagloev plays an important role in promoting the so-called "Russian world," and entices Cubans to attend indoor events by screening Soviet war films with Spanish subtitles. However, according to a former parishioner named Elena K., the clergyman either has a complete lack of patriotism, or is highly familiar with conspiracy techniques. Elena K. notes: "As soon as he's on camera, he quickly removes his St. George's ribbon , and then puts it back on, and he does that several times."

Maurice (Savva) Gagloev

"Rumors" from the GRU, rocket men, and a military builder

Other Russian individuals residing in Cuba are equally intriguing. On the official website of the Russian embassy's school, we discovered 37 students whose parents were not listed on the diplomatic roster.

One notable example is Alexander Utochkin, the father of schoolgirl Alyona Utochkina, who previously served at military base 47747 in Klimovsk before being stationed in Havana. This base became the new location for some equipment following the closure of Lourdes by

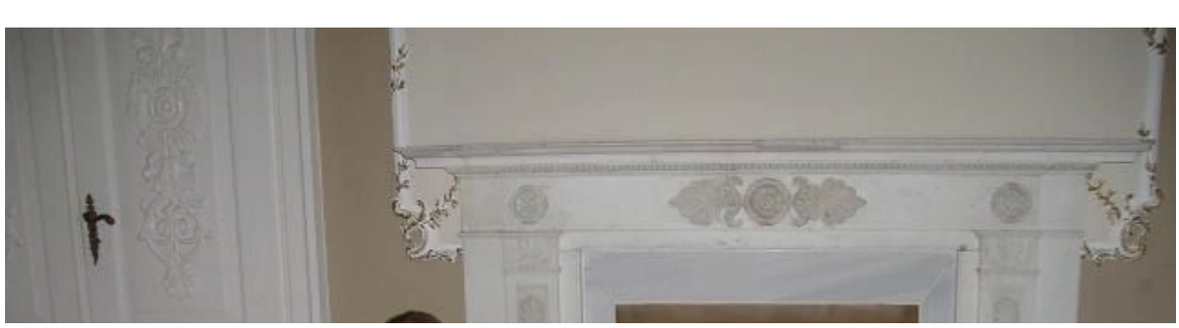
base became the new location for some equipment following the closure of Lourdes by Putin. Until its dissolution in 2013, approximately 80 GRU officers were stationed there, responsible for intercepting signals from US and European satellites. Other GRU personnel received training at the center and were subsequently deployed on extended special assignments under the protection of Russian embassies worldwide – including Cuba. Through social media, *The Insider* came across Pavel Smolko, a liaison officer from military unit 47747, who posted a photo alongside two Cuban women. The photo was taken in 2007, when the REC was officially considered closed.

Pavel Smolko in Cuba

Alexei Polovnikov, whose father Artem Polovnikov served in the village of Vatutinki-1 in the Moscow region, attends the school along with Utochkin's daughter. Vatutinki is home to the GRU's Main Receiving Center for Space Intelligence, which receives information from all corners of the globe.

> "A few decades ago, the software and operational principles were entirely different, and there was no need to maintain a large presence of 'eavesdroppers' in Cuba to monitor every frequency. Nowadays, with only thirty individuals, one can effectively surveil the United States and even extend their reach to Canada," revealed an anonymous source who previously served in the GRU's 309th Radio Direction Finding Center, situated in Klimovsk (military base no. 34608), to *The Insider.*

Some parents at the school have technical degrees and aren't involved in diplomatic work. One such example is Vitaly Kadyrko, the father of Stanislav Kadyrko, who completed his studies at MATI – Moscow State Aviation Technological University. Prior to his deployment to Cuba, he was employed at the Precision Instruments Research Institute, which takes on government contracts from Roscosmos – Russia's space corporation – as well as the Progress Rocket Space Center.



Vitaly Kadyrko

Sergei Poddavashkin, whose daughter Yekaterina is in the 10th grade, graduated from Bauman Moscow State Technical University – an institution whose graduates are heavily recruited by the SVR's Scientific and Technical Intelligence Directorate and the GRU. According to the Russia's Interior Ministry's operative database, Spetsuchet, Poddavashkin was detained for weapons possession in 1993, but was not put on trial. Apparently, his father, who held the position of First Deputy Minister of Railways at the time, solved his problems with the police.

Yegor and Dmitry Lyubushkin are also students at the school in Havana. Their father, Roman Lyubushkin, is not listed as a diplomat. Having graduated from the Academy of Strategic Missile Forces named after Peter the Great, Lyubushkin joined the GRU. The "Petrovtsy," as they are called in military intelligence, are deployed to various Russian embassies worldwide, posing as diplomats while carrying out missile target identification tasks. Some graduates of the academy serve in the Main Computing Center (MCC) at the Russian Ministry of Defense, which previously directed deadly missiles toward targets in Syria. As highlighted in The Insider's October 2022 investigation, *Remote Killers*, these personnel now focus on targeting civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

Dmitry Mihushchenko, the husband of elementary school teacher Inna Mihushchenko, is also involved in rocket science. He pursued studies at the Rostov Military Institute of Rocket Forces before enrolling in the Military Diplomatic Academy (VDA). Interestingly, during his time at the VDA, Mihushchenko was registered at the campus of Russia's Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology, rather than in the officers' dormitory. Twelve other military intelligence officers also resided there, disguised as chemistry students. Some of them were subsequently posted at Russian embassies in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East (the complete list of these "students" was made available to The Insider's editorial team). It is possible that the presence of rocket experts such as Lyubushkin and Mihushchenko in Cuba may be linked to the positioning of a S-400 Triumf missile division near Havana.

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At the time, pro-Kremlin websites posted excited headlines: "Our response to the US!", "It's finally happened!", "The Americans are panicking!" The operation to deliver S-400 missiles to Cuba had apparently caught the Pentagon completely off guard, the publications wrote, with the missile launchers aimed at Florida and the Gulf of Mexico. Some bloggers later deleted their posts about the missile system delivery, and Russia's Defense Ministry dismissed the

S-400 information as fake.

Mikhail Sapega, the father of Tatiana and Victoria, attended Russia's Military Engineering Academy (VIA). The academy trains experts in building missile silos, bomb shelters, and fortifications. In 1962, VIA graduates constructed shelters for Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. However, the US discovered the missiles, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis and narrowly avoiding World War III.

The Havana school website mentions a boy named Stepan as the winner of the "Annals of Victory" contest for children's drawings. As it turned out, the teenager's father, General Andrei Gushchin, heads a group of military specialists in Cuba. He began serving in the Marines in the Northern Fleet, and distinguished himself during the storming of Grozny in 1995, subsequently being decorated with a "Hero of Russia" star. After studying at the General Staff Academy, Gushchin held a number of command positions in Coast Guard units, and commanded Russian Marines in Syria in 2016. Following popular protests in Cuba in 2020-2021 caused by food and medical shortages, General Gushchin was assigned to serve in Havana.

Pay up and spy as much as you want